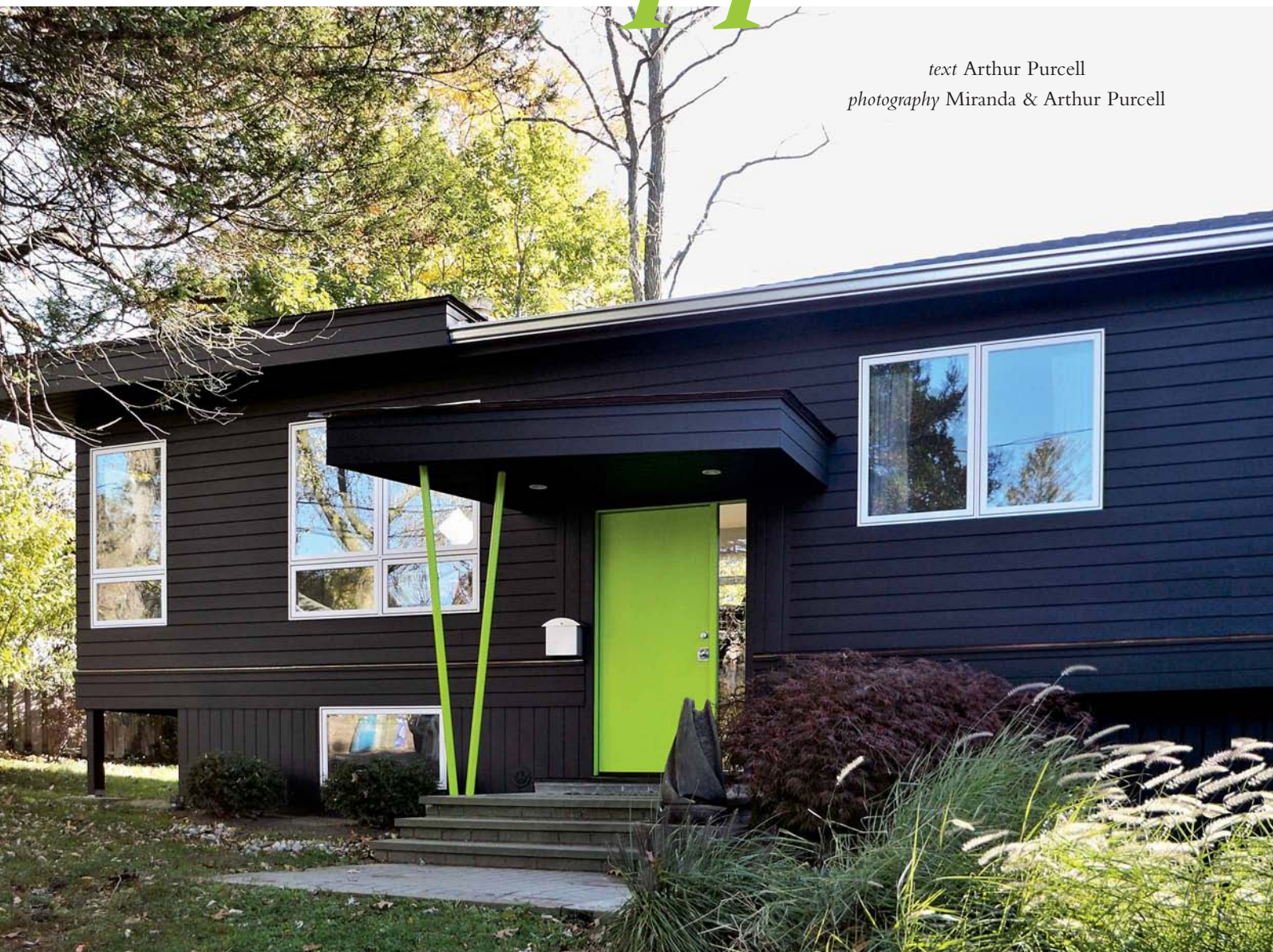


kicking up *the* **Curb Appeal**

text Arthur Purcell
photography Miranda & Arthur Purcell



The purchase of our split-level ranch 11 years ago easily satisfied the prime directive of real estate: location first. As for its curb appeal and architectural interest—let's just say we compromised.

My wife, Camille, and I were first drawn to the Long Island, N.Y., village of Sea Cliff by its ornate Victorian homes, but found that small cottage living suited us better. When we later began to explore mid-20th-century architecture, we saw parallels to our cottage in terms of the low maintenance, straightforward and functional layouts, and exteriors that don't try to dominate their surroundings.

Set on a quiet block among 19th-century homes, our ho-hum ranch lay just a few blocks from the cottage we lived in with our daughter, Miranda. The arrival of son Henry in 2002 compelled us to seek a larger abode, but real estate prices were quickly rising and local housing stock was limited. Although we were underwhelmed when we first viewed the 1965 split-foyer ranch, we convinced ourselves that this oddly proportioned box (known locally as a 'Hi Ranch' and elsewhere as a 'split-entry' or 'bi-level') on a nice lot and priced right could amount to something.

Underdog Status

Split foyers are generally scorned by buyers, and for good reason. Visitors must navigate a set of stairs just to reach the unsheltered front door. Across the threshold lies a cramped, closetless entry area, which doubles as a stair landing halfway between the home's two levels. Open the door too quickly, and you risk knocking an inhabitant down, and even two can be a crowd here. It doesn't help that the country is littered with

We painted the post and the new flush entry door and sidelight Benjamin Moore Lime Green, while the body stain is water-based BM Arborcoat tinted black.





The 10'x10' kitchen has tons of light, thanks to larger windows, a new sliding glass door that replaced a French door, the skylight put in by previous owners and two Aeros pendants over the island. The American black walnut Viola Park cabinetry has accent leaf doors on the dining side of the island. We went with Arctic White Corian countertops—we think the thin 1/2" countertop gives the kitchen a lighter, sharper feel than, say, thick granite, and balances the darker wood.



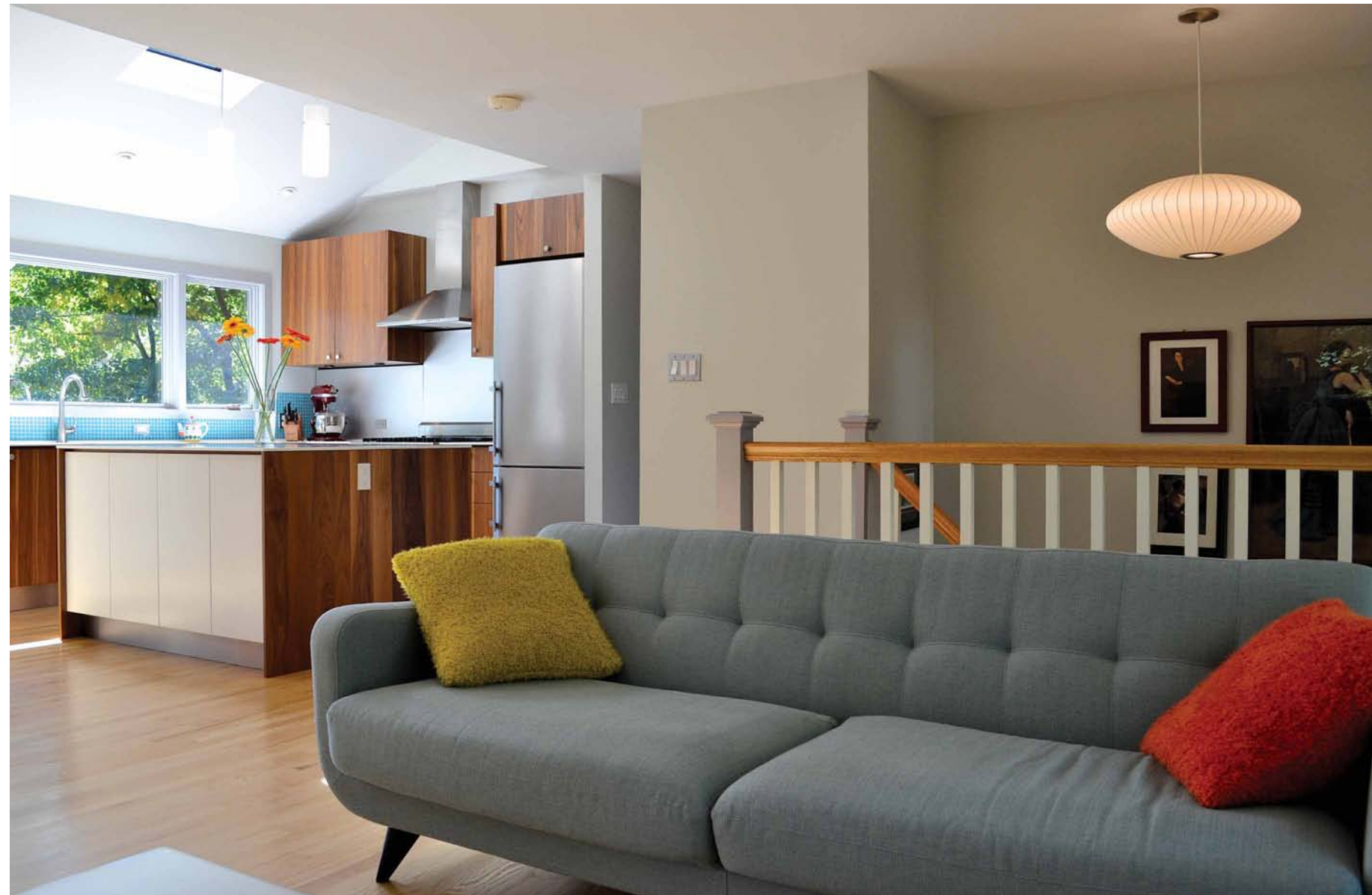
An Anson sofa frames the view of the dining area and open kitchen, and a Nelson bubble lamp hangs over the stairs. Previously, there was a short wall forming a doorway to the kitchen roughly where the end of the island stands.

poorly remodeled split foyers, confirming the subjectivity of the phrase 'home improvement.'

We chose to see the potential. The rooms were somewhat small, but the house had an open floor plan, making it live larger. The upper level provides views from the living/dining/kitchen, and the finished lower level is mostly above-grade. This brightens the space and permits walkout access to the yard. Yes, living on two levels can be tiring, but with the obligatory sleepovers and long video game sessions that come with kids, there are real advantages to having a playroom and den separated from the rest of the house by a set of floor joists.

Undeterred by the low success rate of others, I began a

decade-long obsession with remodeling our split foyer. I began researching midcentury modern homes, poring over shelter magazines and interviewing architects. I discovered that this style—with its centralized staircase plan and partially submerged lower level—seemed to thwart radical remodeling efforts, disappointing those who attempt to transform them into colonials, Tudors and other traditional houses. Accepting the fact that relocating the staircase and enlarging the entry foyer would absorb half of our \$70K remodeling budget (kitchen excluded), and not wanting to move, we decided to focus our energy and wallet on imparting unique, period-consistent features to the facade, adding new and larger windows, and a bit more interior space.



Our expanded living room is furnished with a Frame coffee table (with a custom glass top), a walnut media console and a mirror, all from Crate & Barrel. Other elements are a red Eames LCW, a Nelson cigar wall sconce, Gigi side chair and what we think is a model 132 Sigvard Bernadotte tilt-back chair produced by France and Daverkosen found at a yard sale.



Tall Order

We challenged our local architect, James Carballal, to put on his '50s-modern thinking cap and produce a bold, eye-catching makeover. To add some badly needed living space upstairs, Jim suggested a cost-effective 4'x12' bump-out addition on piers. While this interior space gain was modest, it served other important architectural aims. First, it helped balance the facade's proportions. Second, the added facade length supported a new almost-flat roofline with a projecting eave. Complementing the new roofline and continuing the

removing a small wall to completely open the space, adding new walnut cabinetry from Viola Park with simple aluminum pulls, and selecting efficient stainless steel appliances. We dispensed with upper cabinetry along the back wall, opting for a picture window to frame the view of the yard and beyond. The large island, fitted with drawers and shelves for storage, is great for entertaining and family baking nights. Heat-resistant anodized aluminum backsplash panels on the range wall are also from Viola Park, which works directly with the customer to design modular, mid-budget, green kitchen systems. The entire kitchen remodel, with all materials and installation by our contractor, ran about \$30K, not including six weeks of takeout food receipts.

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atomic-era theme, Jim designed a dramatic front entry overhang, trapezoidal in shape and supported by a steel V-shaped post.

The decision to clad the house in natural cedar and stain it black was surprisingly easy, having been inspired by examples of Japanese 'shou-sugi-ban' burnt wood siding and dark-colored Scandinavian homes. The use of a solid-color stain saved thousands of dollars by eliminating the need for costly clear-grade tongue-and-groove cedar. Carefully primed to prevent unsightly tannin bleed, the cheaper knotty-grade wood worked just fine. Even with those savings, the cladding absorbed almost 20% of our budget. Another 15% went to replacing most of the home's dated double-hung windows with large casements mated to lower awning windows. Standard sizes from Marvin's Integrity line, the fiberglass windows are as durable as they are energy efficient—an important green feature to us.

The kitchen remodel was a complete gut, and included

By coming to terms with our split-foyer ranch, rather than imposing our terms on it, we managed to create something new while respecting the original design. That's not to say we didn't surprise (if not shock) our neighbors by introducing the village's first Darth Vader-hued home, but feedback has been very positive. One day, while sitting in our living room observing one of the many cars that slow down to catch a look, Camille and I noted with irony that this once invisible house, long in the shadows of its grand Victorian neighbors, began to shine only after it was cloaked in black! ✨

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Camille Purcell is the assistant library director in Sea Cliff and Arthur practices customs and international trade law in New York City. For more details on this project, visit purcellart.wordpress.com.